sitting in bed for warmth, and working at her pitiful little—*stories*, he wrote first, then crossed it out and substituted *poems*. The money she should have spent on nourishing food went for stamps to send her stories—no, *poems*—to unappreciative editors. Too proud to tell even the sympathetic landlady her troubles, she stayed alone, half starved, but always with the divine fire glowing within her. Sometimes at night she left the skylight of her garret room open, and against the velvet blackness of the sky saw the eternal stars glow, white, cold, and as distant as the people of the world about her.

Charles Henry came to an abrupt stop. He felt this bit of sentiment made an excellent ending, and, being an artist, he never went farther than the end. He gathered up the loose sheets and read them through with a sort of satisfied mournfulness. It was good stuff, he decided. The introduction, his stumbling through an unlatched door (in the story he did not land in any such undignified position as his knees, you may be sure), the slender, big-eyed little girl who lay upon her narrow pallet,—it made an excellent yarn, and he started for the office, his hat on the back of his head, to get it to press in time for the next day's edition.

THE office he found in confusion. Space had been reserved in the last edition for a write-up of a famous celebrity who subsequently refused to be written. The editor greeted Charles Henry with enthusiasm.

"Say," he called, "any extra Clewes stuff we can run tonight?"

Charles Henry handed over his write-up and departed slumward to investigate a case of wife beating that promised to yield a harvest of tears.

Later the editor, glancing over the proof, nibbled at Charles Henry's sob stuff, at first with a grin, then with a slowly sobering countenance, and finally with distinct moisture in his eyes. He was just rereading it when Charles Henry sauntered in. The wife desertion had proved barren, and he was back at the office in hope of gleaning material from the staff. The editor spotted him across the room.

"Graves!" he roared, to hide his emotion. "Where'd you get this stuff? It's damn good!"

Charles Henry smiled modestly. "Oh, that!" he said. "Why, she's a poor little thing that lives in the room across from mine."

The editor raised his eyebrows. "You don't mean it's straight?" incredulously.

Charles Henry nodded. "Yes," he said, "I guess she's the real thing, poor kid. I stumbled into her room this morning, and she was sitting all wrapped up in a red blanket writing on a pad, and there wasn't a stick of furniture in the room."

The editor brought his fist down on the paper. "It's a shame!" he said. "We ought to be able to help the kid. She writes poetry, you say?"

"I—I'm not sure," said Charles Henry a little guiltily. For the first time he was beginning to realize that he had taken things rather for granted. "She writes something, and I put poetry because it—it went better."

The editor nodded. "Why not bring her down?" he said. "We might try her out, anyway. Miss Gale's swamped with both club notes and the 'Home and Fireside' sheet. The kid could help her until we see whether she can write or not. Bring her down tomorrow."

CHARLES HENRY departed homeward, at first a little doubtful, but later, as his imagination began to work, gloriously. He would knock on her door, explain that he was with one of the papers and they needed a new woman reporter—would she care to take the position? Not a word about her obvious poverty, no mention of his part in the offer; but she would know of course that he had guessed it all, and would appreciate his delicacy. He could see her standing there, gazing upon him, her preserver, with wide brown eyes, unable to believe that her chance had come. Her hair would be fluffed about her face in little curls, she would hold out her hand and say—

He had reached the bottom of the attic steps by this time, and Letitia was standing at the top, her eyes snapping behind their horn-rimmed spectacles, her hair drawn back in a prim knot. In her hand she held a copy of the evening paper. She pointed it at him much as though it were a pistol. When she spoke her voice was crisp and to the point.

"Did you write this drivel?" she demanded.

THAT morning, after dismissing the young man from her mind, Letitia had dressed with her usual neatness, and then, her article finished, begun the delightful task of arranging her Lares and Penates. At half past three she breathed a sigh of relief and looked about her with joy. Four Japanese prints made a good showing against the gray building-paper walls, and the rose of her prayer rug blended with the shade of her droplight. She felt once more at home. It was time to take her walk, and she screwed her heavy hair into a neat but becoming knob, laced her good-sense shoes, put on her raincoat, and went forth to face the weather.

Mrs. Jackson was in the hall, and answered her greeting with a distinctly scornful sniff. Letitia went out into the rain, feeling that she must get better acquainted with Mrs. Jackson. She was really a type, and would be an addition to her book.

On her way back to the house Letitia mechanically bought an evening paper at a stand. It was too wet to glance at it now; so she folded it neatly for future reading. Assuredly she would study Mrs. Jackson. There must be thousands of her kind in the city. She mounted the front steps of the boarding house and opened the door.

Mrs. Jackson was in the parlor. She was clutching an evening paper to her expansive bosom and her eyes were red with weeping. When she saw Letitia her tears broke out afresh. She ran toward her, both arms out.

"You poor dear thing!" she said breathlessly. "I never guessed, I didn't—an' you that proud you wouldn't tell me, poor lamb! But after this I'm going to be your friend, an' if it's a bite to eat, or anything of that kind you want, Clara Jackson's the one to come to."

Letitia stood and stared at her. "I—I don't think I understand," she said, bewildered.

Mrs. Jackson went on without a break. "An' little did I think when Mr. Graves come to me and asked about you this morning (a nice young man, Mr. Graves, an' always pays his rent regular," she added from sheer force of habit)—"little did I think he was planning to write you up like this. Of course as soon as I seen the paper I recognized as how it was you, an' after this, rain or shine, Clara Jackson's not the one to say you no—if you do leave your skylight open."

Letitia interrupted her in sheer amazement. "What—what paper are you talking about?" she asked, grasping at a straw in the flood of speech.

Mrs. Jackson regarded her with astonishment. "Why, you got it in your hand," she said. "Haven't you read it?"

Letitia shook her head dumbly, and the landlady thrust a paper into her hand. She glanced across the Heart Interest page to where Mrs. Jackson's fat forefinger indicated the caption, "Stars Her Only Friends." She started to read it, puzzled; but at the first paragraph her cheeks flamed red.

"I think I shall go to my room," she said coldly, and started up the stairs, Mrs. Jackson's voice following her as she mounted.

ONCE in her room, she read the column furiously. Someone was trying to make a fool of her! She felt humiliated to be referred to as a "little girl" and a "neglected genius" who was cold and hungry. In her indignation she forgot that none but the author and the landlady would connect her with the absurd article, and felt that she was being held up to the ridicule of all Boston. She threw the paper upon the bed and began walking up and down the room with angry strides. There was a rap at the door, and on the other side she found Mrs. Jackson with a tray of food.

"I brought you a little beef tea, Deary," said the landlady, "an' a bit of bread and butter. It'll keep up your strength until supper."

Letitia stepped out into the hall, holding the handle of the door behind her. "There has been a mistake," she said coldly. "I'm not in need of beef tea."

Mrs. Jackson patted her arm comfortingly, while she balanced the tray with her other hand. "Yes, Deary," she said, "I know you wouldn't ask for help, an' I respect you for it. But you needn't be shy with me."

Letitia became suddenly conscious of a desire to seize the tray and hurl it out of the window, following it with the landlady herself. The realization of this astonished her. She had never, in all her well regulated existence, had a similar yearning. For an instant she stood, from sheer force of habit analyzing her mental processes, and docketing them for future reference.

Then Mrs. Jackson's voice broke through her preoccupation. "Sit down and eat it, like a lamb," said the landlady. "There's lots more where it came from."

Letitia suddenly flung open the door behind her, disclosing the full glory of prayer rug, droplight, and mahogany. "Does that look as though I were starving?" she demanded.

Mrs. Jackson surveyed the room with one comprehensive glance, then sank upon the nearest chair to readjust her disordered mind. Finally she spoke. "And you—you ain't starving?" she asked, something like disappointment trembling in her voice.

"No," said Letitia grimly, "I'm not starving, and I'm not penniless, and above all I don't write poetry. As to lying awake to count the stars, I've not reached that particular stage of idiocy as yet; though if this sort of thing keeps up, I may be driven to it." She looked at Mrs. Jackson where she sat, the beef tea dribbling upon the floor in a little stream from the tray on her knees. "Are you satisfied?" she asked.

Mrs. Jackson rose. "I must have made a mistake," she said heavily. "But what with Mr. Graves asking about the girl across from him this morning I thought it must be you needin' help."

Letitia escorted her to the door, somewhat mollified. "If anyone is in need of help," she said, "I should say it was Mr. Graves. He seems to be feeble minded."

Mrs. Jackson shook her head sadly as she turned to descend the stair. "An' him such a nice young man, an' payin' his rent so reg'lar!" she said as she disappeared kitchenward.

LETITIA turned to a reconsideration of the article, and had just worked herself up to a high pitch of indignation when she heard the step of Charles Henry Graves ascending the stair. Seizing the paper, she was prepared to greet him when he came into view.

"Did you write this drivel?" she asked cuttingly.

Charles Henry was taken by surprise. Moreover, being several steps above him, Letitia had the place of vantage from a strategic standpoint.

"Do—do you mean—" he stammered.

"I mean this 'Claude Clewes' idiocy," she cut in, holding the paper as though it were redhot and flapping the damning evidence before him.

"Didn't you like it?" he asked doubtfully.

"Like it!" said Letitia. "Like it!" and her wrath rendered her speechless.

Charles Henry became apologetic. "I'm sorry," he said. "I—I wanted to help."

Letitia looked at him, astonished. "You don't mean to say you thought it was true—this stuff you wrote!"

Charles Henry sat down suddenly on the bottom step. As sometimes happened, the artistic temperament had suddenly deserted him, and left him feeling that he had made a fool of himself. He tried weakly to explain.

"I don't suppose I thought so at first," he admitted; "but after I'd got it written down it seemed true enough."

Letitia stared at him. He was the first specimen of the kind that had come under her observation.

"Do you mean that you can persuade yourself into thinking something has happened by just writing it?" she asked incredulously.

Charles Henry nodded. "Something like that," he admitted. "Of course there's always a foundation; but by the time I've added to it and made a sob story—"

"A what?" said Letitia.

"A sob story," repeated Charles Henry.

Letitia pointed the paper at him. "So you mean to say you dared make a 'sob story' out of me?"

Charles Henry shook his head. "It wasn't you really," he said. "It was the girl I thought you were. Of course I can see now," he added politely, "that you aren't the helpless person I thought. You're much older than I imagined," he added absently. Already the artistic instinct was stirring within him, and he was thinking of something.

Letitia should have been pleased, for one of her principal grudges against the article had been that humiliating "little girl"; but she wasn't. She drew herself up stiffly and looked down at him where he sat on the bottom step.

"I am a professor in the university," she said, "and I am, needless to say, neither cold nor hungry." She retired haughtily into her room; but as an afterthought she turned and added, "Moreover, I write scientific articles, not poetry." Then she closed the door firmly and finally with a vicious little click which inferred that the interview was at an end.

CHARLES HENRY sat on the bottom step and considered the outside of her door for a short space; then he absently climbed the stairs and let himself into his own room, where he sank into a chair and thoughtfully consumed a pipeful of tobacco, after which he knocked the ashes out on the window sill and betook himself to his typewriter. Charles Henry was writing a sob story.

Through the intervening space of hallway and two doors Letitia heard the click of the typewriter, and smiled maliciously. She was in the midst of an article for Parkinson's, an article upon the psychology of the modern journalist. After a time the typewriter ceased to click, and Charles Henry, pulling the last sheet from the machine, settled back to pass judgment upon his performance.

He agreed with himself that it was good, very good; in fact it was away above his usual average. It was neither a story nor a sketch, but something between the two,—the heart secrets of a woman who was two people, a slender, shrinking, poetical girl who tried to hide her real soul behind a cold and repelling exterior. Somehow he managed to picture a shy, wistful little creature, hidden within a crust of good-sense shoes and horn-rimmed spectacles.

Of course it wasn't true, he told himself savagely. She probably hadn't a feeling in the world, and her youngness and prettiness were the false part of her, not the shoes and spectacles. However, it made a good story, too good for a mere newspaper. He really ought to try it on a magazine. He'd change it enough so that the girl couldn't object; but with a bit more plot it ought to sell. At this point his eye fell upon the neglected steak, and a little later the fragrance of fried onions floated across to Letitia, deep in her scientific treatise, and Letitia hated onions.

SO far she had sternly held herself in leash, and had striven to deal gently with the foibles of the modern journalist; but the onions were the finishing touch, and she dug her pencil into the paper with renewed energy. The modern journalist was a poor and shriveled thing when she had finished with his mental processes. She bared his soul to a jeering